# A Country’s Development
# The Buddhist Standpoint

A country cannot progress without the simultaneous progress of its people. Hence a country should progress with its people. This is the Buddhist standpoint. Human progress is the advancement of human excellence through spiritual development. It is because of this that Buddhist scholars defined the pali word for man, namely  ‘manussa‘ as ‘one who has a progressing mind‘ (*manassa ussannataya manusso*).

In Buddhism the greatest meritorious deed is to work for the progress of man. The Buddha himself toiled for forty five years to bring about this human progress. It is for this same purpose that He preached the Dhamma. He then, established the Sangha or the congregation to carry forward this task. It is indeed fortunate that both the Dhamma and the Sangha are yet in existence.

It was a member of this Sangha tradition, Arhant Nigrodha who preached the Dhamma and convinced King Asoka, known as Chandasoka (Asoka the Fierce) to give up violence. He not only came to be known later as Dharmasoka (Asoka the Righteous) but also became one of the greatest kings in the world. He built 84,000 Buddhist temples. The country progressed. Similarly the world of his time.

The intelligentsia has endorsed the Buddhist standpoint that a progress of a country should be with its people. Here is a case in point. An intelligent father made a jig saw puzzle of a map of the world. It has the picture of a human form on the reverse. He called his son and asked him to fit the jig saw puzzle. He tried hard but failed. Yet he did not give up. His determination made him think hard. He noticed the human form on the reverse of the map and began fitting it. Once he finished he turned the other side and there was the map of the world. He was jubilant. When the farther asked him how he did it, he explained that when he finished fitting the human form, the world map turned up unprompted by him.

Developed nations have been providing assistance to developing, nations for nearly four decades. A large number of Asian countries, including Sri Lanka,

were among the recipients of such assistance. The governments of the recipient countries have worked earnestly to develop their countries but the achievements on the whole have been frustrating. For example, let me cite Sri Lanka. During the past 35 years, staring from the Colombo plan, Sri Lanka has received aid from a host of countries amounting to billions. Every Government in power worked for the progress of the country utilizing this aid. But the anticipated results have not been achieved.

A research on this phenomenon undertaken by an UN Agency located in Bangkok has revealed that the main contributory factor for not achieving the desired results was the lack of attention paid to human development. The highest priority was given instead to economic development. This has now been rectified. Now the emphasis is on human development. Economic development has taken the third place.

## ***Dharmavijaya***

In the past, When Sri Lanka was assiduously following the Buddhist standpoint with regard to development, which is, the economic development of a country and the moral development of its populace are simultaneous, Sri Lanka became famous as the Island of Dhamma (*dhammadīpa*) and the Granary (*dhānyāgāra*) of the East. How was this achieved?

King Dharmashoka was expanding his empire in India by conquering the neighboring states. His final war was against the state of Kālinga. Millions died during this war. Although he won the war, he was depressed due to the large numbers killed. He then decided to give up war (*disāvijaya* – victory of lands) and launched on Dharmavijaya (victory of the Dhamma). He guided the country by gaining the goodwill of the people through the Dhamma.

In implementing the Dharmavijaya policy in his own realm, King Dharmashoka decreed that “All humans are my children“ (*save munise pajā mama*). Accordingly he was able to win the hearts of a heterogeneous populace and achieve national unity.

He achieved religious unity by accepting the principle that teachers of other religions also merited veneration. “Other sects ought to be duly honored in every case. If one is acting thus, he is both promoting his own sect and benefiting other sects.” (Rock Edict XII). He was thus able to gain the goodwill of those following other faiths.

“Concord indeed is commendable“ (*samavāyo eva sādhu*) was decreed by him in his edicts and by following this policy he achieved peace and harmony in his kingdom. He spread this universal message in all the countries at the time through his missionary services.

## *Dharmadhūta (missionary) service*

The third of Buddhist Council (*dharma sangāyanā*) was held under the auspices of King Dharmashoka and presided over the Arahant Moggalīputa Tissa. It was agreed at the Council to send Buddhist missionaries to the rest of his kingdom and foreign lands. There were

1. Kashmira and Gandhāra
2. Mahisamandala i.e. modern Mysore
3. Vanavāsa i.e. modern North Karnataka in South India
4. Aparantaka i. e. modern Gujerat and Kathiywar
5. Maharaṭṭha i.e. modern Maharastra
6. Yonaloka i.e. Helenic world
7. Himavanta padesa i.e the Himalayan country
8. Suvarnabhūmi i.e. Lower Burma and Siam and
9. Lankādīpa i.e. Sri Lanka.

All these missions were headed by Arahants.

King Dharmashoka also established diplomatic ties with the Middle - East countries. These countries were Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyrene, Epirus, Palestine and Alexandria. In addition to the ambassadors, he appointed special envoys called ‘Dharmamahamatras‘ to spread the Dharmavijaya principles. They

were followed by Buddhist monks who travelled to the Middle East for the spread of Buddha Dhamma.

According to Eugene Burniff, there is enough evidence to suggest that Buddhist monks were in Jerusalem before the birth of Jesus Christ. Recent archaeological Excavations in Turkestan have revealed that Sinhala monks had lived in that part of Russia.

In the period that followed, many countries in the Middle - East have accepted Buddhism as their faith. It has been recorded in the Mahvamsa that thousands of Arahants from the Middle - East had attended the foundation - stone laying ceremony of the Ruwanveliseya in Anuradhapura. The majority of them had come from Pallavabhogga which has been identified with modern Iran and Iraq. Due to the efforts, of king Dharmashoka to imbue Dharmavijaya principles among the populace, peace and concord prevailed not only in India but also throughout the Middle - Eastern counties. Because of peace, the countries also witnessed a high rate of growth and development.

### *Kanishka Era*

King Kanishka continued with King Dharmashoka's work of spreading the Dhamma. With its dissemination, Dharmavijaya principles too had a spontaneous growth. During his time Buddhist missionaries went to China for the first time. From China, Buddhism spread to Mongolia, Manchuria, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and Eastern Tibet. From these countries Buddhism spread further.

### *The Shailendra Era*

The Shailendra Kings set up an empire called Sri Vijaya with, according to some, Panambang in Java as the Centre. The countries to which the Dharmavijaya principles spread during this time, along with the spread of Buddhism, were Java, Sumatra, Bali, Malacca, Borneo, Celebes, Malaysian, Peninsula, and Singapore.

By the end of the Shailendra period, the practice of Dharmavijaya principles was gradually weakening. The Buddhist Kingdoms had to face continuous

foreign invasions. There was destructions and vandalism of Buddhism Shrines. In India, there was a rapid decline of Buddhism with the devastation of Buddhist temples and places of learning. The world famous Nalanda University and five other Buddhist Universities were amongst those, that were raised to the ground. There were similar events in other Buddhist countries which included modern Malaysia and Indonesia.

## ***Present Buddhist Renaissance***

Today India is experiencing a revival of Buddhism. Buddhism is also spreading rapidly in Europe and the Untied States. Two persons from Sri Lanka need Special mention in this regard. They are Ven. Narada of the Vajiraramaya and Anagarika Dharmapala. In Europe and the U.S.A. there are, at present nearly 150 Theravada Buddhist temples. The number of Mahayana temples is even more. Buddhist societies number over 1500. Over 2000 persons in many counties are subscribers of the Buddhist publication Society, Kandy.

Sri Lanka had been acclaimed as, the Island of the Dharma and the Granary of the East. Later because of our own disunity and the invasions by three European powers, which followed one after another over a period of 450 years, there was an economic and moral decline among the Buddhists. The recent Buddhist revival is the result of the untiring efforts of Buddhist monks and lay leaders.

There are about 30,000 monks in Sri Lanka to-day. The number of temples exceeds 8000. Buddhist organizations total over 10,000. Pirivena institutions, where monks get their education number about 500. There are two Buddhist Universities. Around 1.3 million children attended Dhamma schools numbering around 6,000. The population of Sri Lanka is 16.5 million. 74% are Sinhalese, and 70% are Buddhists. Only 4% of the Sinhalese are not Buddhists.

## ***Dharmavijaya in Sri Lanka***

The Sasana Sevaka Society was founded 31 years ago with the objective of training bhikkhus and moulding the lives of lay Buddhists. Bhikku training is done

successfully at the Siri vajiranana Dharmayatanaya, Maharagama. For the training of laity, sil and meditations programmes are organized, Dhamma School and Dhamma classes are conducted and a programme for youth titled Thurunu Saviya is being implemented. Under coordinated village rehabilitation programme twelve villages in the remotest areas were developed and a model village was established. Now this activity is being undertaken and implemented most successfully by the Dharmavijaya foundation.

The need for planning has been accepted throughout the world. The importance of working according to a plan and a time frame was first taught to the world by the Buddha. It is possible to formulate extensive plans for rightful development based on the Buddha's discourses. Details of a plan for living, from the time of conception to death, based on the Dharmavijaya principle that a country's material development with moral decadence is not development and hence a country's development should combine with the development of man himself, is given in the attached document. It is my earnest request that you not only read it with care and mould your life accordingly, but also encourage enthusiastically your friends and relations to follow suit.

Daily News 1990.07.14
Typist: Mr. Chamitha Lakmal